

the country celebrated the centennial Republic Day on May 28 of this year.

Since first declaring independence from the Russian Empire in 1918, Azerbaijan sought to be an example for new nations by adopting a National Charter granting all citizens within its borders full civil and political rights, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, or gender. The United States was quick to recognize and support Azerbaijan in 1918 and again in 1991, as Soviet dominance over the country ended.

Since then, Azerbaijan has continued to be an ally and partner to the United States, notably being among the first to provide comprehensive and unconditional assistance following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Azerbaijan continued to support the Global War on Terror efforts in Afghanistan, providing airspace to NATO jets en route to Afghanistan, and ground transport for non-lethal supplies in the region. Notably, Azerbaijan is one of the few Muslim-majority countries that enjoys strong relations with Israel, and it is this commitment, not just to the United States, but also her allies, that shows Azerbaijan's continued dedication to remaining a trusted and close friend to democratic nations across the globe.

Azerbaijan continues to be a leader in promoting global energy security. Once completed, the Southern Gas Corridor project will provide European markets access to natural gas in the Caspian Sea, allowing our European allies to diversify their energy sources, while bypassing Iran. This access is crucial to maintaining energy security in the region and promoting global trade opportunities for the United States and its allies.

Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank the people of Azerbaijan for their continued partnership and friendship, and ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Azerbaijan on this historic centennial Republic Day.

LAMAR SCHOOL DISTRICT EMPLOYEES RECOGNIZED FOR 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

HON. PETE OLSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Beverly Richard, Helen Daniels and Lydia Torres for their 40 years of service and dedication to the Lamar Consolidated Independent School District (CISD).

Beverly, Helen and Lydia have each worked for the school district for forty years. They were recently recognized by Lamar CISD for their dedication to our children and our schools. Their tenure and commitment to educational excellence is a true asset in our region.

On behalf of the Twenty-Second Congressional District of Texas, congratulations again Beverly Richard, Helen Daniels and Lydia Torres on 40 years with Lamar CISD. I thank them for their commitment to education and to our kids.

HONORING BARRY BENDER

HON. ELIOT L. ENGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, communities find their strength in the dedicated individuals who offer their time and talent to benefit the greater good. For the past 18 years, Barry Bender has been one of those people regularly making selfless contributions to the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, or Bayit community.

Barry's service to the Bayit began as a natural extension of his Jewish professional life, conducting Jewish educational experiences throughout the U.S. and Canada using technology and multimedia.

He has brought his creativity and technical skills to many Bayit events and activities including the annual dinner, and to the video production and broadcast of the annual Selichot concert.

As an award winning amateur photographer, Barry is often seen around the Bayit with his camera documenting Shul life. He has given classes on a variety of topics including "Jewish Meditation," and "The Seven Days of Creation Through the Eyes of Science." He is also a proud member of the Bayit's Community Security Service (CSS) Team.

Barry's real claim to fame at the Bayit though is being a second generation shul lollipop man, continuing in his father zt"l's footsteps. His dedication to our community is a direct result of the values his parents taught him by example.

On June 3, 2018, at their 44th Annual Journal Dinner, the Bayit is honoring Barry Bender with their Community Service Award. I want to echo their recognition by extending my gratitude to Barry for all he has done to enrich the lives of those around him. This honor is extremely well-deserved.

INTRODUCTION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS VACANCY REDUCTION ACT

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, today, I introduce the District of Columbia Courts Vacancy Reduction Act. This bill would allow local District of Columbia court nominees to be seated after a 30-day congressional review period unless a resolution of disapproval is enacted during that period. Currently, nominees cannot be seated without affirmative Senate approval. The congressional review process for nominees would be the same one used for legislation passed by the D.C. Council. It is therefore a reliable process, long-recognized by Congress. My bill is prompted by the unique requirement that judges for the local D.C. courts be confirmed by the Senate, where nominees for the federal courts, understandably, get the primary focus and priority. There is currently an urgency facing the District's criminal and civil justice systems, and the D.C. courts have raised serious concerns due to longstanding vacancies.

Whether under Democratic or Republican control of the Senate, the local D.C. courts

regularly face vacancy crises, which harm the operations of the judicial system in the District. Congress created the D.C. Judicial Nomination Commission (JNC) to recommend candidates, and Congress should generally defer to its judgment. This bill is a compromise, useful to all concerned, that retains a congressional role while saving the Senate time by removing the need for committee and floor action and increasing the odds that D.C. will have a full complement of local judges.

Currently, there are 10 vacancies out of 62 authorized judges on the D.C. Superior Court and two vacancies out of nine authorized judges on the D.C. Court of Appeals. In the current Congress, only one judge has been confirmed.

Both pre- and post-home rule, the District has never had control over the nomination and approval process of local D.C. judges. My bill would not alter the role of the JNC or the President in the nomination process. Under the Home Rule Act, the JNC recommends to the President a list of three persons for each vacancy on the Superior Court and Court of Appeals. The President must nominate a candidate recommended by the JNC within 60 days to the Senate for advice and consent. If the President fails to nominate such a person within 60 days, the JNC must nominate a recommended person directly to the Senate for advice and consent. The Senate has no obligation to provide its advice and consent. Under this bill, once a name has been transmitted to Congress, the nomination would be deemed approved unless a resolution of disapproval is enacted into law during a 30-legislative-day review period.

I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation.

TRIBUTE TO MARIA A. THOMSON

HON. NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor the life and achievements of Maria A. Thomson who was a tireless lifelong leader and advocate for the community of Woodhaven, Queens which she dearly loved. On January 10th of 2018, Mrs. Thomson passed away, leaving behind a lifelong legacy of community service and civic engagement. She earned the respect of city and state leaders, in fact she was known as the unofficial "Mayor of Woodhaven". With over 40 years of community activism, Mrs. Thomson's accolades and accomplishments are numerous. I hope to highlight some of her life's work today.

Mrs. Thomson was a dedicated public servant who cherished public safety and quality of life. Early in her career she was elected President of the 102nd Precinct Community Council, bridging the gap between law enforcement and the community. She later founded the volunteer local Civilian Patrol. As a result of her leadership, she earned the unique distinction of being the first and only civilian to be recognized as the 102nd Precinct's Honorary Police Officer of the Month. Furthermore, she annually honored the fallen heroes of 911 and our nations veterans.

To better ensure the delivery of government services to Woodhaven, she joined Queens